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ABSTRACT

A pilot program in New South Wales (Australia) aimed to engage Aboriginal students in the education process by making school more interesting and relevant to them specifically. The project used career education and Aboriginal perspectives to achieve these objectives. The development of aspirations within students was central, and it was hoped that raising Aboriginal students' awareness of careers and the role of education and training in relation to employment would increase their attendance and retention. The project encouraged the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives through consultation and participation by Aboriginal parents and community, culturally inclusive resources and materials, and Aboriginal guest speakers and facilitators. It was expected that the aspirations of parents and community would be enhanced as a result of involvement with the program. Twelve secondary schools in New South Wales participated in the project, implementing the program to suit their own needs. Not all schools were successful in implementing the project. School staff varied in their recognition of the need for specific Indigenous programs, their understanding of the extent of career education, and their attitudes toward inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. The program's potential to impact Aboriginal student attendance and retention was unclear. Three critical issues were identified: greater understanding and recognition of the issues faced by Aboriginal students and communities are necessary for programs such as these to succeed; career education warrants greater attention in curriculum development initiatives and in school programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; and successful program implementation is largely dependent on "ownership" by school staff. (TD)

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Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program:

School and community Career Education

A Report and Discussion on a NSW Board of Studies Project

ED 467 125

Kevin Lowe and Julie Tassone

Project Overview

Rationale:

The aim of the Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program (ACAP) in NSW has been to provide tools to assist schools in trying to address the critical issues of Aboriginal student attendance and retention. The project used the vehicles of career education and Aboriginal perspectives in two contexts to achieve these objectives.

Quite simply, the project aims to engage Aboriginal students in the education process by making school more interesting and relevant to them specifically. It is hoped that by developing in Aboriginal students an awareness of careers, pathways and the role of education and training in relation to employment later in life, that there will be an increase in their attendance and retention through to Year 12 completion. Furthermore, the project encourages in various contexts the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives. This entails not only integration of Aboriginal historical perspectives and culture but a contemporary picture as well. In line with the NSW Department of Education and Training's Aboriginal Education Policy, the program has a strong emphasis on consultation and participation by Aboriginal parent and community representatives in the educative process. Attention is drawn to the use of appropriate resources and materials that are culturally inclusive and, where possible, Aboriginal guest speakers and facilitators are included.

Central to the project is the notion of 'aspirations'. It is hoped that the materials will provide programs and learning experiences for Indigenous students that relate to their own personal aspirations. This may include the development of existing aspirations or it may mean the development of new aspirations that students had not considered previously. The development of aspirations within students is central to the program and is seen as a positive vehicle in which to build knowledge, self-esteem and identity. Furthermore, it is expected that the aspirations of parents and community will be enhanced either as a direct result of involvement with the program or via complementary activities.

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The career education outcomes that the project targets have been mapped against the NSW Board of Studies document 'A Statement of Career Education Outcomes 7 – 12'. This document provides a framework for the delivery of career education across compulsory and post-compulsory years. It provides detailed outcomes and pointers against each of the four key areas of career education. They are as follows:

- Learning about self in relation to work
- Learning about the world of work
- Learning to make career plans and pathway decisions
- Learning the skills required to implement career decisions and manage work/study transitions

All of the four areas have been addressed by the program and a matrix demonstrating the delivery of outcomes is included. A number of points should be considered in relation to the outcomes delivered by the program. Firstly, they are not intended to be definitive. That is, schools are encouraged to further develop teaching curriculum that provides for the delivery of career education outcomes where appropriate. Furthermore, given the current low rates of Indigenous student retention through post-compulsory education, the program provides for the delivery of career education outcomes as early as possible and in a comprehensive fashion. The reality for Indigenous students means that schools must start addressing career education at least in Year 7. Schwab's study demonstrates that in 1998 67.9% of non-Indigenous students in NSW stayed at school until Year 12, while the comparative figure for Indigenous students was 31.4.%.[1] While this project does not suggest that it can alone address the issue of attendance and retention, the success of other programs (in Queensland and South Australia) do support the notion that this approach has positive outcomes for Indigenous students.

Project Outcomes:

The outcomes targeted by the project include:

For Indigenous Students:

- Increased self-awareness, confidence and esteem through motivational activities, critical thinking and self analysis.
- Empowerment so as to take control of own learning and development.
- Increased knowledge of own ambitions and understanding of how to translate ambition to career path/success.

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[1] Schwab, RG, "Why Only One in Three?" The Complex Reasons for Low Indigenous School Retention" (CAEPR, 1999), pg 5.

- Increased career information and understanding of career pathways, education and training options.
- Increased awareness of relevant links between education, training and employment.
- Increased links with local community representatives and employers.

For Schools:

- Increased understanding of the needs of Indigenous students in relation to careers education and 'mainstream' education.
- Increased awareness of culturally appropriate and meaningful teaching methods across all spheres.
- Development of partnerships and improved links with parents, local community groups, training providers and employers.
- Increased retention and participation of Indigenous students across compulsory and non-compulsory years.
- Increased academic achievement of Indigenous students.
- Increased ability of schools to identify and meet the needs of Indigenous students in mainstream and career education.
- Increased participation in VET in Schools programs by Indigenous students.

For the Community:

- Increased educational, training and employment outcomes for local youth.
- Meaningful and improved participation in educational and training processes for local youth.
- Increased understanding of and participation in educational processes.
- Increased skill base at a local level.

Project Summary

The project included a development and consultation phase (which has been ongoing through the early phases of its implementation), an independent research project, a pilot phase and finally production. The process is described below.

Curriculum Development:

The project has produced a comprehensive curriculum document that incorporates career education and Aboriginal perspectives across the Key Learning Areas. Three documents *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program -Teacher Resource Book*, *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program — Units of Study*, *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program — Units of Work* have been developed by Board of Studies staff and external consultants (including participating pilot school staff). It has been piloted in the participating schools with further refinements being made as a result of the consultation and pilot project. The document includes the following units:

Stage 4		Stage 5
Maths	Music	Mathematics
Science	History	English
Geography	Design & Technology (D&T)	Visual Arts
Personal Development, Health, Physical Education (PDHPE)		Music

The document also provides information to schools regarding the incorporation of both career education outcomes and Aboriginal perspectives across curriculum and ideas to assist with this process as an ongoing whole school approach.

Career Education Program (ACAP) Development:

The project has also produced a teaching resource book and student worksheets that provide a comprehensive guide to running specific and targeted career education activities and programs for Indigenous students. The resource material and worksheets can be found in *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program -Teacher Resource Book, Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program — Units of Study, Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program — Units of Work:*

These materials include:

- 9 Week Program — Year 7
- 9 Week Program — Year 8
- 9 Week Program — Year 9
- 9 Week Program — Year 10
- Tips for organising a Careers Expo
- 2 Day Workshop (general career education) — Year 7/8/9/10
- 1 Day Workshop (CV Writing) — Year 9/10
- 1 Day Workshop (Successful Job Applications) — Year 9/10
- Work Experience/Placement Reports — Year 7/8/9
- Excursion to University/TAFE Campus Indigenous Unit — Year 7/8/9/10
- Careers Survey — Year 7/8/9/10

There are in excess of 60 student worksheets that correspond with each of the teaching strategies/programs.

Research:

The research component of the project was put to selective tender. All NSW universities and Aboriginal education units were contacted and asked to submit proposals. The Board received five responses and after careful consideration the Umulliko Indigenous Research Centre of Newcastle University was chosen to conduct the research.

The research brief identified the following objectives:

- Identification and critical analysis of existing research, reports and projects relating to career education and retention in relation to Indigenous students.

- Development of base line data for both communities and students in the area of career aspirations and expectations.
- Determination of whether students have a clearer sense of their career options and aspirations as a result of participating in the project.

The methodology employed included pre and post program questionnaires to all participating students in the pilot. Community and student focus groups were also held pre and post the pilot program in four selected sites including, metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Lester, J (October 2000) *Evaluative Research Into the Office of the Board of Studies, Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program for Aboriginal Students in NSW High Schools — Cooee Koori.*
(http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/aboriginal_research.html)

Pilot Project:

Twelve NSW Department of Education & Training schools participated in the project. All schools implemented the program to suit their own school and student needs. Not all schools were able to successfully implement the project. The level of participation from all schools involved is demonstrated below. It should also be noted that some schools joined the pilot at a later stage than others.

School	Subjects / ACAP*	Comments
School 1	• Maths • English • ACAP	*The ACAP was delivered by the Careers Adviser as a withdrawal program run over the course of the Term.*
School 2	• Maths (part) • History (part) • D&T (part) • ACAP	*Parts (only) of each subject area as listed were delivered by the school.* *The ACAP was delivered by the Careers Adviser as a withdrawal program run over the course of the Term.*
School 3	• Visual Arts • PDHPE	*The Visual Arts unit was developed by the teacher and implemented as part of the pilot. The unit has been revised as a result of the pilot and other feedback, and*

		is part of the final product. *Parts (only) of the PDHPE unit were delivered.* *The school employed the services of an external Indigenous consultant who delivered a on- day career workshop to students.* *There was no use of ACAP materials.*
School 4	• Science • ACAP	*A one day Indigenous careers day was run by the Careers Adviser and Aboriginal Studies teacher including external community representatives.*
School 5	• English • ACAP	*A new English unit was developed by this school which included career education and Aboriginal perspectives.* *A one day careers workshop was run by the Careers Adviser including external community representatives. This workshop also targeted students at risk within the school.*
School 6	• History • ACAP	*Only a limited number of ACAP sessions were delivered by the school as a withdrawal program. This was run by the Careers Adviser.*
School 7	• PDHPE	*Only a limited number of PDHPE sessions were delivered by the school. There was no use of ACAP materials.*
School 8	• ACAP	*This school piloted the 2 Day (general) Workshop targeting students in Years 7 — 11.*
School 9	• ACAP	*This school re-organised its timetable to*

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		implement one of the 9-week programs including approximately 35 students. *The school was also developing its own curriculum materials that incorporated career education across Years K — 6.*
School 10	• English	*This school used the ACAP materials within the context of English classes.*
School 11	• Science • English • History • ACAP	*ACAP was delivered in conjunction with an existing withdrawal literacy/numeracy program for Indigenous students and coordinated by the AEA.*
School 12	• D&T • Maths • PDHPE (part)	*Both the TAS and Mathematics units were developed by staff at this school and piloted with their students. Both have incorporated the units in their teaching programs for future use.* *There was no use of ACAP materials.*

**For ease of reference the specific Aboriginal career education programs have been referred to as ACAP.*

In excess of 500 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students participated in the pilot project involving the curriculum documents. This includes students from Years 7 — 10. The ACAP was piloted by in excess of 300 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students from Years 7 — 11.

All schools were visited by the Project Manager prior to the pilot commencing. All schools were also provided with financial support to facilitate their participation. This was made available for activities including:

- Payment of guest speakers (as required)
- Teacher Relief for planning/programming/etc

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- Teacher Relief for consultation with ACAP Project Manager
- Travel
- Catering
- Materials
- Administration

It should be noted that though schools were enticed to participate in the pilot project with a grant of $4000, the program had been written in such a way that implementation of it would need to draw only minimally on school resources. The development of these resources had been predicated on the fact that their commitment would be enhanced if schools knew it could be done without funding from any central agency within the system.

In order to gain feedback to further inform the development of materials the Program Manager conduced follow up visits or phone interviews with schools and feedback was incorporated as appropriate.

Consultation:

Consultation was been extensive in the development of project materials. Beyond the involvement of the pilot schools the project has undertaken consultation with:

- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc
- DET Student Services & Equity Programs
  - Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU)
  - Aboriginal Education Consultants (AECs)
  - Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs)
  - Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs)
- DET Curriculum Support Directorate
  - Aboriginal Studies Team
  - Work and Career Education
  - School to Work
  - VET Consultants
- Catholic Education Commission

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A Reference Group has overseen the project and met on a number of occasions throughout projects development and implementation. The project was presented in a number of forums including DET hosted Indigenous VET Seminars, VET Consultants Conference, the NSW Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group Second State Conference (2000), an article appearing in the Board Bulletin and information posted to the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation on-line discussion list Wadu-NET. [2]

Project Findings: What did we learn from the pilot process?

The following points are a summary of field observations and experiences based on the pilot project and the project development as a whole.

- There were varied levels of recognition by school staff of the need for specific Indigenous programs, with particular reference to career education. This included varying levels of awareness and recognition by school staff of the disadvantage or circumstances experienced by Indigenous people in relation to the labour market. This has implications with regard to how school staff view specific programs for Indigenous students and how such programs are implemented.
- There is a limited understanding about career education from 'non-careers' staff, with some equating of career education with workplace exposure. The full extent of career education as it has been represented in documents such as the BOS Career Education Outcomes (1996) document (or other sources regarding career education) is not frequently seen. In some instances the focus for career education has been on (1) workplace exposure and (2) exploring training options. While both are important in themselves, this does leave gaps for students in dealing with critical areas of development such as self-esteem/identity, the changing world of work, managing transitions, etc.
- A whole school approach to planning and implementation of career education is likely to have greater impact. For Indigenous students in particular, this should occur across Years 7 — 10 (and into Year 11/12). Some participants in the project expressed concern regarding students' inability to engage in some materials due to a lack of previous career exposure/knowledge. Concern was also expressed about such programs being piecemeal if a longer term approach is not taken to career education (rather than leaving it until Year 10 which is the case for many schools).
- The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives presents challenges for school staff. This is compounded through lack of consultation with community/parents; lack of involvement with DET and school based Aboriginal staff; limited involvement of parents/community at classroom

[2] http://www.ecef.com.au/e-wadu

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level (as aides, etc); and stereotypical ideas about Indigenous perspectives — i.e. only presenting 'traditional' Aboriginal perspectives rather than contemporary perspectives.

- Trial schools indicated that they would have difficulty with implementing the program again and that without external support and/or funding they probably would not do so. This comment applied in particular to the ACAP more so than use of the curriculum materials and needs further investigation. Where there appeared to be a more genuine commitment to the program, schools became involved and the project demonstrated successful results. Without a commitment to the program the financial support available to pilot schools was not sufficient to encourage implementation and is therefore not the most critical factor for programs such as ACAP.
- When there was a commitment or sense of ownership from the school staff involved the program was successful. This was further emphasised when the principal was supportive and took a leadership role, although success was not dependent on this factor. Where staff were 'required' to participate the achievements were reduced.
- There is a very clear need for greater involvement of Indigenous parents and community in the program. This did not occur on a very large scale in any of the programs, however schools did use the services of Aboriginal guest speakers, organisational representatives, etc.
- Each school ran the program in its own way and to varying extents. This demonstrates the need for materials that are flexible and not too prescriptive as every school and community has different and individual circumstances/students/community.
- There was considerable discussion as to the most appropriate years in which to run career education initiatives for students. While it is the contention of this project that for Indigenous students this cannot start too early, there are many school staff who do not concur with this view, including Careers Advisers.
- While the project overall was well received by schools and staff, students and parents, the potential to impact on the fundamental issue of Aboriginal student attendance and retention was not clear. Generally it was agreed that if implemented in isolation, the program would not dramatically impact on these issues. However, it was recognised that there is potential for such initiatives to have a positive impact, not only on school attendance and retention, but on post-school training and education. In order to dramatically affect the retention of Indigenous students through post compulsory years a number of strategies will need to be employed including (but not exclusively) career education initiatives.

- In many cases the Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEA) within schools were not heavily involved in the program. Many staff involved in the program did not see the obvious need to work with the AEA. It appeared (in many cases) that AEAs were used for 'trouble-shooting' or assisting with disciplinary issues. There were notable exceptions to this practice and these programs demonstrated positive outcomes.

Summary of Project Findings

Three critical issues have been identified in an attempt to find a positive and manageable response for the future of the program and other similar initiatives.

1. Greater understanding and recognition of the issues faced by Aboriginal students and communities is necessary for programs such as these to succeed.
2. Career education warrants greater attention in Curriculum development initiatives and in schools programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
3. Successful implementation of programs such as ACAP is largely dependent on 'ownership' by school staff.

Greater understanding and recognition of the issues faced by Aboriginal students and communities is necessary for programs such as these to succeed.

4. Appropriate training and awareness raising in the area of the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) for all school staff will assist with programs such as ACAP. Many of the findings discussed above are addressed in this important policy document, including the critical issues of involvement of parents/community in the education process and incorporation of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.
5. Involvement and recognition of Aboriginal staff in programs specifically for Indigenous students should be enhanced. There is an opportunity for schools to formalise inclusion of Aboriginal staff and their role in such projects.

Career education warrants greater attention in Curriculum development initiatives and in schools programs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

6. The understanding of many school staff relating to career education is limited and is seen as a barrier to the implementation of career education initiatives such as ACAP and the associated curriculum materials. This incorporates defining career education and how or when career education should be delivered.

7. A whole school approach is seen as the optimum means to implement career education programs. This should be encouraged via principals and senior staff so as to ensure that a good range of career education experiences are provided for all students.

8. There are further opportunities to develop career education within the K-6 and 7 - 10 syllabuses. The NSW Board of Studies should continue to develop inclusive curriculum taking account of both career education and Aboriginal perspectives. The materials developed by this project provide examples that could be taken up in future syllabus development activities.

Successful implementation of programs such as ACAP is largely dependent on 'ownership' by school staff

9. As with all similar programs, they work best when they are developed and managed at a local level. This project has reinforced the fact that successful programs rely on commitment from staff involved. ACAP will be successful in the future when, and if, schools and communities adopt it and adapt it at a local level.

Key findings of Independent Research [3]

- Parent/community and students are looking to the school to assist in breaking down barriers that are seen to impact on students access to career opportunities. Though each group demonstrated an often naive view of the complexities of the social, political and economic circumstances which impact on major obstacles to improved career outcomes, they believed that schools are in a position to after guidance support and access to students as they negotiate their transition from school to work.

- Systemic issues such as poor student learning, retention and attendance, (school and community) and underlying racism continue to confront and impact on Aboriginal students aspirations. Many students reported the difficulties that they or friends experienced in gaining employment opportunities. This issue impacts on a student's capacity to access many school programs which require work experience placement such as Stage 5 work education and Stage 6 VET programs. This issue must be addressed if Aboriginal students are to undertake any number of school run VET and Vocational learning programs.

[3] Lester, John (Oct 2000) *(Evaluative Research into the Office of the Board of Studies, Aboriginal Careers Aspirations Program for Aboriginal Students in New South Wales High Schools).* http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/acap_cooee_koori_report.pdf

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- Students in geographically isolated communities have demonstrated a negative view of their education and career aspirations. The diminished social capital of these communities, along with the almost non-existent employment opportunities impact to limit the capacity of students and communities to vision a wider sense of education and career aspirations. Student knowledge of the wider employment market tended to be limited to the point that for many, the extent of their aspirations was limited to the local Community Development Employment Program (CDEP).

- Student self-esteem, life aspirations and confidence need raising through meaningful engagement with the wider world of work. This engagement should occur at school with student access specific programs such as ACAP and through providing vocational opportunities in their local or nearby localities. These programs need to be delivered in a way that is both culturally sensitive and in a manner that extends students' appreciation of the value of educational achievement to long term career opportunities.

Implementation strategies for ACAP 2001 - 2003

The NSW Department of Education and Training and Catholic Education Commission have been funded for five years through the diversion of funds that were previously available to schools through VEGAS implementation strategy programs. This project will focus on the transition of students from Year 6 through to the end of Year 8. A complementary project will target the vocational learning requirements of students across Years 9 - 12. Year 6 learning materials have been written and are presently being piloted in 6 schools in the Hunter Region and Taree. These will then be incorporated into the package of resources that form the basis of this project.

In the latter part of Term 4 2001, approximately ten collegiate school clusters will be targeted for 2002. Each cluster will focus on a high school and it's feeder state and catholic primary schools. In subsequent years, additional schools will be added to the statewide implementation of this project.

All secondary schools in NSW have received a copy of the ACAP kit during 2001. The materials will also be available on the BOS Website for schools[4]. Other appropriate stakeholders including NSW Department of Education and training, Catholic Education Commission and DETYA officers and consultants have also received a copy of this kit.

[4] http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/aboriginal_research.html

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Broader Issues for Career Education and Student Aspiration Program Impacts.

Though there has been almost a century of theorizing about career education programs, it has only been in the last decades that contemporary theories have acknowledged the need to contextualise the development of Career Education within a framework which responds to both the individual (through the recognition of their own agency) but with a growing acknowledgement of the wider social milieu within which all people work and live (Patton 1997, 15; Sarra 1997, 47-57).

There is a constant tension in this complex of intersecting impacts on students' educational and career aspirations. The degree to which individuals have agency in fashioning their own future, within a wider socio-economic environment enables them to work towards giving reality to the achievement of these goals. Earlier psychological theories, which focused on the individual, failed to recognise the power and pervasiveness of the wider sociological environment in which we all live. The lack of a comprehensive career education theory that recognises the realities of the social structures which impact upon the day-to-day lives of people, has severely limited the usefulness of many programs delivered to students. Studies continually demonstrate the complexity of students' self-concept. Research undertaken by Vandrack, Lemer and Schulenberg (Patton 1997, 4-6) concluded that to understand career behaviour, it is essential to recognise the contextual influences of issues such as social class, intelligence, sex, ethnicity, race and racism.

The reality of these contextual influences weighs heavily on the experiences of many Aboriginal students, who as a group, have often failed to actualise either their aspirations (individual and collective) or potential to take their place in the wider world of education and work. While not wishing to comment in any great depth on this issue, it should be acknowledged that there are many as yet unresolved tensions in the theorising of current Aboriginal education policy development. The growing dependence in curriculum development on constructivist theories in developing programs for schools, with its focus on individual agency, can counter to the policy rhetoric of self sufficiency and self-determination. This rhetoric is firmly rooted in the collective cultural and social aspirations of Aboriginal communities. (Smith 1994: Smith 1992). The delivery of education to Aboriginal students is as much a political as an educational process for it has to be delivered in a world that acknowledges the power of both individual and collective senses of identity and which stresses cultural difference over further assimilation. Policies and programs which fail to account for the political and social aspirations of Aboriginal people are unlikely to impact on improving educational outcomes. One part of this complexity is, as Sarra (1997, 48-9) points out, the need to understand both the micro as well as macro environments in which Aboriginal students live. He argues that the delivery of career education programs must acknowledge the diversity of communities as well as the individuals who make them up (Sarra 1997, 48-51).

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Increasingly there has been an acknowledgement for the need for a contextualist framework that places individual growth and change alongside the constantly changing context of employment opportunities. (Patton 1997, 4) Gottfredson's theory of occupation aspirations (see Patton 1997, 4) accepts the fundamental importance of individual self-concept in vocational education and argues that people will seek jobs that are compatible with their image of themselves. While Gottfredson focused on the determinants of social class, intelligence and gender. There are many who assert that race and geographical location should be added. Russell's (1992) study demonstrated that Aboriginal student perceptions of the world of work was rooted in their very contextualised senses of self and places and had a large impact on view of career options that were open to them.

Further issues in respect to students self concept centre on the degree to which it is related to successful student learning. Any analysis of the key learning outcomes for Aboriginal students would indicate that they are not achieving at the same level or pace as their peers. The fact is that across each cohort, the learning achievements in English literacy and numeracy have been shown to fall as early as Year 3 and have been shown to continue through into high school. The consequent impact on the level of student engagement with schooling must be seen as having detrimental long-term effects on self image as well as educational and career aspirations. There is a considerable body of research which deals with the issues self-identity and educational outcomes. Much of the Australian literature in this area has dealt with demonstrating effective educational practices that impact on developing positive outcomes for Aboriginal students (Purdle 2000, 36-41). However this review also reported on research, which outlined the many inadequacies of schooling for Indigenous students, and the impact that this has had on developing negative perceptions of self. The correlation that exists between family, schooling, achievement, self esteem and heightened career aspirations demonstrates the need for greater work to be undertaken to provide learning environments which allow for students to grow in self esteem through achievement of real learning outcomes. This in turn may impact on improved student aspirations.

The implications are clear for Aboriginal students, who on the whole have lower rates of attendance and retention (especially in early and middle secondary school) and on-going problems with standard literacy and numeracy as measured through various assessment regimes inYear3, 5, 7 and 8.

These changes to the way that educational theorists have re-conceptualized career education matches in many ways the findings of the seminal work of Kahl (1953) who sought to determine the co-alignment of intellectual ability with student ambitions across the range of social status backgrounds. Majoribanks (1995) among others have sought to further this work, by investigating the socialisation processes that have tended to orientate individuals towards particular goals. Majoribanks found that the amount of social capital a particular family environment can bring to bear on the life of a student is capable of impacting on that student's opportunities and self-perceptions. The research demonstrated that while intellectual

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ability plays a part in the function of student aspirations, parent aspirations and cultural capital that their family and community can provide also impacts on a student's education and career aspirations.

A further major finding of Majoribanks' 1995 study emphasised the importance of families, by reporting on varying student's perceptions of the support that parents provided. His research demonstrated that the degree of social capital that families could bring was dependent on the levels of family education and the depth and strengths of the bonds, which existed between the adolescent child and their parents (Russell 1992, 10).

Wall, Cowell and Macintyre (1999) examined the opportunities that students accrued as a result of positive social support. They reported on the impact that higher levels of social support had on student's vulnerability to stress. They demonstrated that increased levels of social support (as defined by notions of being cared for and valued) were more likely to lift student academic achievement

Gool and Patton (Gool 1999) took up the issue of family support in their study on the career aspirations of young Aboriginal women, as did Nasirs (1996) in her report on the Northern Territory Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program. Both programs reported the importance of families to the career aspirations of students, and the heavy reliance that was placed on them by students to provide the primary influence in regards to career decision making. Lester (2000) reported similar influences of parents on student knowledge of career options. In reporting on students he went further in observing that Aboriginal parents indicated that they looked to the school to provide knowledge on career information. Lester's informants appeared to be cognizant of the limitations of their knowledge about career options, but believed that schools needed to recognise the importance of open and inclusive dialogue between themselves, students and parents about the career options and the impact that these will have on the level of school engagement.

Wall (1999) conceptualised adolescent career development as arising from the actions and meanings that are often co-constructed by peer group members. The power of these conversations is the influence they have in contributing to the ways in which adolescents evolve their career ideals and assimilate that group's particular norms and values through everyday interactions (Young 1999, 528). Given the levels of resistance to schooling by many Aboriginal students, as evidenced by the sharply declining rates of student retention through Years 7 – 10, it could be argued that the co-dependency of students in this age cohort will more likely validate senses of identity which are very unlikely to privilege positive ratifications of educational and career aspirations. For many students, this period in their development is built around school failure, low attendance, increased levels of interaction with the police and juvenile justice system. Increasing disengagement at this age is heightened by negative peer influences and is unlikely to allow students to engage in the validation of those values, beliefs and goals which underpin success at school. Bourke's work (2000) outlines the complexity of the issues of Aboriginal student

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attendance, the scant attention to the school based factors which impact on this issue, and the influence of social and cultural obligations which continue to represent a problem for school and students.

Lester (2000) pointed out that while Aboriginal parents had clear aspirations for their children, their expectations were often very limited. He reported that parents frequently looked to local employment programs such as Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) as being a desirable long-term career aspiration for students. His research also indicated that geographic isolation narrows and limits student aspirations and expectations (Lester 2000, 16). Rural isolation was also seen to have a major effect on the transition through school and onto further education or work of many Aboriginal students. Long (2001, 6) reported that youth in rural and remote areas experienced additional barriers in their experience of schooling and the subsequent transition to post school options. The delivery of programs that can have a positive effect on student career aspirations continues to be hindered by poor school practices, that fail to provide stability and good teaching pedagogy, combined with rural isolation and the associated raft of acute social welfare issues such as low or non-existent employment opportunities, poor quality housing, welfare dependency, poor health and wide spread substance abuse.

The aim of this discourse on Aboriginal student aspirations has been to highlight a range of issues, which require further attention. Further work needs to be undertaken to address the issues of parent and community involvement in education. We need to look at positive ways to actively involve students, with their parents and communities, in educational experiences that can impact on improving student expectations for successful engagement in the world of work.

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